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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 003728

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SUBJECT: THE TURKISH MILITARY: OZKOK TRIES TO STRIKE  
BALANCE AS DECEMBER 2004 APPROACHES

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman. Reasons: 1.4 (B and D).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) Turkish General Staff (TGS) CHOD GEN Ozkok continues to balance the promotion of Turkey's EU membership prospects by reducing the Turkish military's past position at the commanding heights of politics with a desire to ensure that the Turkish military is able to intervene in domestic politics if/when necessary and appropriate. While skeptical about PM Erdogan's intentions and capabilities, Ozkok continues to be reluctantly open to working with Erdogan on those reform areas that he deems necessary to give Turkey the best shot possible at securing a favorable response from the EU in December. He understands the concern of his service chiefs, other senior officers and the rest of the secular establishment that PM Erdogan and the AK Party (AKP) aim to weaken the "secular" state. At the same time, he has taken measures to control the message by clamping down on the service chiefs and other members of the Turkish military, including restricting their access to USG officials. This has produced an apparently contradictory attitude by some senior military officers and other committed secularists who simultaneously attribute AKP's coming to power to unwarranted, conspiratorial US support, and are increasingly trying to woo US support.

2. (C) We expect these disgruntled senior military officers to increase their efforts to reach out to US officials to try to express their concerns and possibly undermine what Ozkok and Erdogan appear to be doing to make the best case for Turkey in December 2004. We recommend that Washington and others, if approached, encourage TGS interlocutors to use existing official channels to convey their views to ensure that we stay on message and speak with one voice. End summary.

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UNLIKELY BEDFELLOWS, BUT (CURRENTLY) NO CHOICE  
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3. (C) TGS CHOD GEN Ozkok and PM Erdogan are not comfortable in their relationship with one another. They continue to meet (often one-on-one) as they have since Ozkok became CHOD in August 2002. While their reasons may differ, Ozkok and Erdogan share the view espoused by the majority of the Turkish public that a Turkey anchored in the West and the EU is the best recipe for political and economic success. Each has a segment of his constituency that is wary of the EU and does not believe it is in Turkey's interest to make the necessary reforms to secure a date for accession talks in December. Yet, there is no love lost between the two, and the question remains whether the modus vivendi they appeared to have established initially has held up as Ozkok has become disillusioned with Erdogan's and AKP's behavior.

4. (C) Erdogan and Ozkok engaged in a complex game of maneuver on Cyprus, with Ozkok making it crystal clear in his unusual mid-April press briefing that he considered Erdogan and the government to have veered away from the government-military understanding on Cyprus reached at the January 23 National Security Council meeting. How closely the two are coordinating on Iraq also remains an unresolved question for us.

5. (C) By all accounts, Ozkok is as ardent a defender of the secular republic as any senior military officer and, as such, remains highly distrustful of Erdogan and AKP's intentions. The recent controversy over a government proposal to reform higher education and give graduates of vocational high schools (including religious high schools) greater access to high education intensified the establishment's suspicion. But the divisions between AKP and the secular establishment are more than philosophical: Erdogan, his government and the Anatolian heartland they represent threaten the establishment's traditional monopoly of control over the economy. Thus, while philosophical controversies like that with vocational high schools may be resolved or indefinitely postponed, the differences between AKP and the secular elite remain profound.

16. (C) Nonetheless, Ozkok is a pragmatist and a realist: with AKP firmly in charge of the political landscape in Turkey and without an effective political opposition, Ozkok has no viable alternative with whom to work. While some within the Turkish military and the public see the military as the only existing, functioning opposition to AKP, Ozkok correctly recognizes the limitations (some of which have been self-imposed by Ozkok) on the military's ability to directly govern the country in 2004. No one is looking for the Turkish military to take over running the country, a step that would be the kiss of death for Turkey's EU bid and likely for Turkey's economy as well. As a result, Ozkok has little real alternative but to work with Erdogan to the extent he can while allowing the military to look for ways indirectly to exploit and exacerbate Erdogan's and AKP's manifest weaknesses.

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OZKOK: IN CONTROL, TIGHTENING THE REIGNS  
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17. (C) Ozkok continues the process of strengthening his control over the TGS and the services he began at his first High Military Council meeting as CHOD in August 2003. Many of the three-star generals who ran divisions at TGS were then retired or reassigned, and replaced by individuals with similar backgrounds and outlooks as Ozkok. Ozkok's preference for officers with broad international experience, including assignments at NATO and deployments to Bosnia and Kosovo, can be seen down to the 06 (colonel) branch chief level in TGS. Ozkok is expected to strengthen his control over TGS and the services through the annual promotion and assignment process this August. For example, we do not expect him to have difficulties with First Army Commander (and former TGS deputy) GEN Buyukanit if the latter becomes Land Forces Commander this summer (as expected), since Buyukanit wants to succeed Ozkok as CHOD.

18. (C) Ozkok also has re-instituted the monthly TGS press conference, where TGS deputy Basbug ("the face of TGS," according to one well-connected MFA official) delivers lengthy statements on important foreign policy (Iraq and Cyprus) and domestic issues, and takes questions from the press. The purpose of these press conferences is two-fold: to remind governing AKP and the Turkish public that the military is following closely the many important foreign and domestic policy issues that confronting Turkey; and two, to let the same group know that TGS -- as opposed to the service chiefs or retired generals -- speak for the Turkish military. Two recent signs of efforts by Ozkok and Basbug to control access (and thus the message) involve us: one, TGS (through the MFA) denied the Ambassador's request to meet with the Service chiefs (we had requested the appointments after hearing from well-connected contacts that the Service chiefs were feeling neglected); and second, TGS declined an invitation from the Deputy Chief of Mission to host TGS J5 Lt. Gen. Babaoglu and his J5 general officers for a working lunch. This kind of limited access was more the norm before the Iraq War; reinstituting these restrictions increases Ozkok's control over the content and timing of messages emanating from the military. At the same time, Ozkok and Basbug continue to make themselves readily accessible to visiting US officials and the Ambassador, and, in a departure from their predecessors, Ozkok and Basbug also meet with the UK Ambassador here.

19. (C) The service chiefs and other senior members of the military remain highly suspicious of AKP and are convinced that Ozkok is selling out the military and the Republic through his reluctant willingness to work with Erdogan to move the country forward. Most of these individuals were selected by Ozkok's predecessors, do not possess his international experience or Western outlook, and question whether secular Turkey and the Turkish military will be better off with Turkey as a member of the EU. While a number of senior military officers attribute AKP's coming to power to unwarranted, conspiratorial US support, they paradoxically also appear to be searching for unconventional ways (i.e. conferences in Europe) to get their message across to sympathetic senior US official officials.

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DECEMBER 2004  
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110. (C) We expect Ozkok and Erdogan to continue warily to work together during the next six months to take the necessary steps to secure an EU accession negotiation date from the EU in December. While Ozkok's hand is likely to be further strengthened by the retirement of two of the most outspoken service chiefs (Land Forces Commander GEN Yalman and Jandarma Commander GEN Eruygur) this summer, he is still likely to face some opposition within the military as he attempts to move the military and the country forward. The remaining two service chiefs and other senior military officers who are distrustful of Ozkok's perceived

accommodation with Erdogan and fearful that the military's sacred place in Turkey's society might be weakened by Turkey's drive for entry in to the EU can be expected to complicate Ozkok's efforts. We expect these disgruntled senior military officers to increase their efforts to reach out (both directly and through intermediaries) to US officials to try to express their concerns and possibly undermine efforts by Ozkok and Erdogan to secure a favorable decision from the EU this December. We recommend that Washington and others, if approached, encourage GOT officials to use existing official channels to convey their views to ensure that we stay on message and speak with one voice.

EDELMAN